

City of Alexandria, Virginia

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 27, 2003

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER *PS*

SUBJECT: CITY COUNCIL CONSIDERATION OF THE FY 2002 ANNUAL REPORT
FROM THE ALEXANDRIA COMMISSION ON HIV/AIDS

ISSUE: City Council consideration of the FY 2002 Annual Report from the Alexandria Commission on HIV/AIDS (Attachment).

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council receive the Annual Report from the Alexandria Commission on HIV/AIDS and thank the Commission for its efforts on behalf of the City.

DISCUSSION: The Alexandria Commission on HIV/AIDS is a 27 member advisory board to City Council to study HIV/AIDS issues affecting citizens of Alexandria.

The Alexandria Commission on HIV/AIDS has prepared a report that highlights the principal activities of the Commission during FY 2001 and FY 2002 (July 1, 2000 through June 30, 2002) and the Commission's planned future efforts.

Alexandria saw a slight decrease in the number of reportable HIV cases as compared to most other Northern Virginia communities. The rate of HIV infection reported for residents of Alexandria, however, exceeds that of all Northern Virginia communities. The Commission has seen a slight decrease in new HIV cases among Alexandria's African-American population and a slight increase in new infections among Alexandria's white and Hispanic populations. The Commission will continue to work to educate all Alexandrians about HIV/AIDS and how to avoid infection.

At the Commission's request, we will process an ordinance change to amend the composition of the Commission to change the designated seat for Hopkins House to a representative of a community-based organization providing services to the HIV/AIDS community in Alexandria.

ATTACHMENT: FY 2002 Annual Report for the Alexandria Commission on HIV/AIDS

STAFF:

Charles Konigsberg, Jr., M.D., M.P.H., Director, Alexandria Health Department
Deborah Dimon, R.N., M.P.H., PHN Supervisor, Alexandria Health Department
Nechelle Terrell, HIV/AIDS Administrative Technician, Alexandria Health Department

City of Alexandria
Commission on HIV/AIDS

2000-2002 Report to City Council

Scott E. Schwartz, Chair
Brent Minor, Vice Chair

Alexandria Health Department
Debby Dimon, Staff

Commissioners

Penelope Bridges
Merry Brinkley
Lesley Buchan
Dennis Burstein
Zarah Burstein
Kathleen Bury
Hugo Delgado
Paul Florentino

Michele Garfinkel
Vincent Guss
Elizabeth Johnson
Frances Krizan
Elizabeth Maloney
Sarah Markel
David Mcgrath
Brent Minor

Anthony Rawls
Michael Starkweather
April Stubbs-Smith
David Tarantino
Nancy Turner
Jenny Wade
John Wertman
Jordan White

Purpose:

The Alexandria Commission on HIV/AIDS (ACoH/A) advises City Council in the formulation and implementation of public policy on the treatment of AIDS and prevention of the spread of HIV, promotes citizen participation in the formulation of such policy, provides Council and the public with current information regarding AIDS and HIV, and promotes educational programs on AIDS/HIV awareness, treatment and prevention. (See Section 2-4-117 of the City of Alexandria Code)

Commission Composition:

The City Council appoints twenty-seven citizens to ACoH/A, as follows:

Seven citizens-at-large

Two members from INVOA Alexandria Hospital, (one representing the hospital's department of pastoral services);

One member representing each of the following organizations:

Whitman Walker Clinic
Hospice of Northern Virginia
Hopkins House
Alexandria Chapter, American Red Cross
Alexandria Gay and Lesbian Community
Association
Northern Virginia AIDS Ministry
Alexandria Ministerial/Interfaith Association
INOVA Visiting Nurses Association Home Health
City of Alexandria Public Schools

Alexandria Public Health Advisory Commission
Sheriff, or the sheriff's designee
Alexandria Community Services Board
Alexandria Human Rights Commission
Alexandria Youth Policy Commission
Alexandria Commission for Women
Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority
Practicing physician; and
Student from T.C. Williams High School.

Alexandria's commitment to HIV/AIDS leadership and education dates back to 1987, when Alexandria created the Alexandria Task Force on AIDS, becoming the first Virginia community to recognize the significant public health issues posed by the epidemic.

Issues Facing ACoH/A In the Future:

- AIDS and HIV remain a major public health threat and must continue to be monitored. Continued public education remains the single most important means of preventing the spread of HIV. ACoH/A will meet its responsibilities to develop and monitor public education programs and advise the City Council about relevant events in Alexandria.
- In 2000, Alexandria's Hopkins House determined to end its HIV/AIDS case management services program. Under current law, an ACoH/A seat is designated for Hopkins House based on its provision of these case management services to Alexandria's African-American community affected by HIV/AIDS. In light of Hopkins House' decision to terminate these services, ACoH/A recommends the Ordinance establishing ACoH/A be amended to replace the Hopkins House designated seat with a seat designated for "a community based organization providing services to the HIV/AIDS community in Alexandria."
- Needle exchange – Studies conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services have demonstrated that needle exchange is an effective HIV prevention strategy and that needle exchange does not lead to an increase in substance use. Needle exchange saves lives in a cost-effective way -- a sterile syringe costs ten cents while the lifetime cost of treating a person with HIV disease begins at \$120,000. A 1997 consensus report from the National Institutes of Health cited needle exchange as a vital and highly effective AIDS prevention strategy. Despite these facts, most jurisdictions, including Alexandria, oppose any type of needle exchange program, even privately funded programs. ACoH/A will continue to advocate for implementation of a needle exchange program that would include free, anonymous HIV testing, access to drug treatment programs, and safer sex education.
- Virginia Secretary of Health and Human Services, Jane Woods, accepted ACoH/A's invitation to speak at its May 2002 meeting. Secretary Woods identified key areas of interest to ACoH/A, including the constraints created by Virginia's budget deficit. Secretary Woods added that another challenge is the absence of any champions of public health issues in general, and HIV/AIDS in particular, in the Commonwealth's legislature. Despite these challenges, ACoH/A remains committed to working with Alexandria and Virginia leaders to increase awareness of affordable housing issues, increase access to rental assistance vouchers, increase affordable housing development, increasing access to affordable housing in Northern Virginia and educating and promoting HIV/AIDS issues among Virginia's representatives. ACoH/A also will work to obtain State support of waivers to Medicaid eligibility requirements to permit access to Medicaid funds to wider groups to avoid the current necessity for those in need of health care to spend down their assets and become "poor" enough to gain access to Medicaid funds.
- Alexandria saw a slight decrease in the number of reportable HIV cases as compared to most other Northern Virginia communities. The rate of HIV infection reported for residents of Alexandria, however, exceeds that of all Northern Virginia communities. ACoH/A has seen a slight decrease in new HIV cases among Alexandria's African-American population and a slight increase in new infections among Alexandria's White and Hispanic populations. ACoH/A will continue to work to educate all Alexandrians about HIV/AIDS and how to avoid infection.
- ACoH/A will continue to publish and disseminate its quarterly Facts & Stats providing information about HIV/AIDS, trends, medical news and items of community interest. ACoH/A is also working toward providing Internet-based access to current and past issues of Facts & Stats.

ACoH/A encourages citizen participation in its efforts and invites anyone interested in attending ACoH/A meetings or events to contact Nechelle D. Terrell, HIV/AIDS Administrative Technician, Alexandria Health Department, (703) 838-4400 ext. 305

How ACoH/A Has Worked To Meet Its Goals:

The past year has been an active and difficult one for ACoH/A. Notably, the Alexandria Health Department staff, including Elizabeth Deal, Valerie McDonald, Debby Dimon, and Dr. Charles Konigsberg, have worked tirelessly to assist the Commission and promote its efforts. ACoH/A expresses its thanks to the City for its support in obtaining funding for a staff position within the Alexandria Health Department focusing on HIV/AIDS issues. Elizabeth Deal admirably served the Commission and the citizens of Alexandria in that capacity and we look forward to productive support from the Health Department's new HIV/AIDS Administrative Technician, Nechelle Terrell.

Prior to the creation of ACoH/A, Alexandria established the Alexandria Task Force on AIDS in 1987, with similar goals and responsibilities but lacking full Commission status. On May 13, 2000, the Alexandria City Council approved full Commission status to address AIDS education and policy in the City. ACoH/A's first official meeting occurred in August 2000. Transitioning from the Alexandria Task Force on AIDS was difficult and the Commission confronted the resignation of its first Chair, for health reasons, and the decision of a long-time and active Task Force member, Matthew Murgia, not to seek appointment to the Commission. Others, however, quickly stepped up to the plate to move ACoH/A forward and establish its presence in Alexandria.

Despite the initial difficulties, ACoH/A has worked toward accomplishing its purposes as set out in the City Code. The following lists some of the efforts and accomplishments achieved by ACoH/A since its creation:

- ACoH/A has worked with the Alexandria Health Department, Commission members representing designated community constituencies, and community organizations to educate the public about the spread of HIV/AIDS and to encourage public participation in developing and recommending policy initiatives.
- ACoH/A meets bimonthly, giving Commissioners an opportunity to share the activities, advances and issues facing their wide-ranging and varied constituencies.
- ACoH/A continues to publish its quarterly newsletter, Facts & Stats, providing HIV/AIDS information of interest to Alexandria residents. Facts & Stats is distributed to community based organizations providing services to persons with HIV/AIDS, educators, and City offices.
- ACoH/A, in conjunction with the Alexandria Human Rights Commission, distributed HIV/AIDS literature at the 2002 Capital Pride celebration.
- Bimonthly ACoH/A meetings have welcomed presentations by researchers, community-based organizations, and local and Commonwealth officials regarding HIV/AIDS issues.
- ACoH/A sponsored a first-ever "AIDS 101" program in Alexandria to provide officials with current information on the status of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, including statistics, trends, services and resources to support prevention and care services and to educate officials on the spread of sexually transmitted diseases both nationally and locally.
- ACoH/A advocated for legislation to waive Medicaid eligibility requirements by raising the maximum permissible income levels for Medicaid recipients.
- ACoH/A presented issues of importance to Alexandria to the Virginia Community Planning Council of the Virginia Department of Health.
- ACoH/A worked with the Alexandria Health Department to lessen the impact of the withdrawal of Hopkins House from providing services to victims of HIV in the African American community.
- ACoH/A has met with community-based organizations working with persons with HIV/AIDS to Alexandria by providing an opportunity to present information on offered services to the constituencies represented by Commissioners.

For further information on ACoH/A or to learn how to contact individual Commissioners, call the Alexandria Health Department at 703 838-4400.